

Tar Heels Pull Away From LBSU

Written by Staff Reports

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North Carolina knew its first road game would reveal more about its makeup and provide its first big test. It took about a half for the Tar Heels to pull away. Sophomore forward James

Michael McAdoo scored 18 points and freshman guard Marcus Paige added 15 points and six assists as the 11th-ranked Tar Heels defeated Long Beach State, 78-63, on Friday night. McAdoo scored 12 points in the second half and grabbed eight rebounds as the Tar Heels ended Long Beach State's 23-game home winning streak in front of a record crowd of 6,912 at the Walter Pyramid.

The Tar Heels (3-0) shook off a slow first half and got hot from 3-point range during an 18-6 run midway through the second half. P.J. Hairston had 14 points in a reserve role and Brice Johnson finished with 10 points and seven rebounds.

"It's a good step," McAdoo said. "We really needed that. It taught us a whole bunch about our team. It's just another win under our belt, a confidence booster, but we still know we have a lot of work to do."

Long Beach State twice pulled to 10 points down in the second half, once on a 3-point play by James Ennis, but Paige made a pull-up jumper and Hairston hit a 3-pointer for a 73-60 edge. McAdoo helped extend the lead when he drove and finished with a reverse dunk for a 66-50 lead that made the visiting Tar Heels fans erupt, and he hit a short jumper for a 68-52 lead. North Carolina went 10 for 27 from 3-point range. Its 27 attempts were as many as it attempted in its first two games. Ennis led the 49ers (1-2) with 18 points and Mike Caffey scored 14. Dan Jennings had nine points and 11 rebounds.

It was the first game of a western swing for the Tar Heels and their first game at Long Beach State, which played at North Carolina the past two seasons. Long Beach State installed temporary bleachers at one end of the arena this season to increase the Pyramid's capacity by 1,800, and the fans were close to the the Tar Heels' bench.

"I thought it was a great college atmosphere," North Carolina coach Roy Williams said. "I don't mind college kids yelling at me. I get yelled at all time."

Paige and his teammates showed they could handle the pressure after a slow first half.

Hairston, Reggie Bullock, Leslie McDonald and made consecutive 3-pointers for a 59-45 lead. Peter Pappageorge stopped the run with a 3-pointer before Hairston responded with another 3. Freshman forward Joel James contributed nine rebounds, including four on the offensive end.

"I'm impressed with everybody on this team, Marcus included," McAdoo said. "We're a young team. The four freshmen are all making leaps and strides tremendously in each game we play. I think the second half was a good test. We came out strong and then they kind of came back. But in the end we were just able to rely on our defense and 3-point shots were going down. Everything started clicking."

Caffey played 38 minutes and Ennis 37 as Long Beach tired in the second half. Caffey came down on his left ankle in the second half and wobbled but stayed in the game. Ennis said both his calves cramped up on him.

Depth is an issue for Long Beach State, particularly in the backcourt, as the 49ers are struggling to find adequate backcourt help after freshman guard Branford Jones went out this month with a leg injury.

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"It sounds like an excuse, but I thought Branford's injury was really tough today because Mike had to play too many minutes," Long Beach State coach Dan Monson said. "Mike is the only guy that can really bounce the ball and create for others and we needed a second guy to come in and play beside him and relieve him some. We're going to have to figure that out."

North Carolina ended the first half on an 8-3 run and took a 33-32 lead into halftime despite going nearly five minutes without making a field goal late in the first half.

McAdoo and Johnson put back missed shots and Johnson got open for a dunk to pull the Tar Heels to 32-31. With fewer than 10 seconds remaining Johnson took an in-bounds pass and scored an uncontested layup to give North Carolina the lead.

North Carolina failed to make a field goal from McAdoo's put back at 6:50 to his dunk at 2:05. Long Beach State took a 29-25 lead on a corner 3-pointer by Pappageorge to ignite the crowd. Caffey scored a floater for a six-point lead before North Carolina overcame two turnovers and a foul to climb back.

"We felt we weren't playing to the best of our abilities and we were losing by one," Caffey said.

"We thought we had a good chance in the second half."

The Tar Heels shot only 32 percent in the first half, including 3 for 13 from 3-point range.

McAdoo didn't score his first basket until 8:12 to go in the first half. Long Beach State was equally poor with 36 percent shooting and 3 for 14 from beyond the 3-point arc.

The previous record attendance was 5,649. North Carolina was the second-highest ranked team to play in the arena behind fourth-ranked Stanford in 2000. Long Beach State fell to 0-7 against ACC opponents.

The Tar Heels take on Mississippi State Monday in the second round of the EA Sport Maui Invitational. Coverage begins at 5 p.m. on MIX 102.3 FM.

Photo Courtesy: Marcus Paige, UNC Athletics